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ABSTRACT

Few studies on teaching culture have empirically investigated the significance between the teaching methodology and the results. To investigate the influence of specificity of cultural information and mode of presentation on attitudes toward South Americans, 113 college students in introductory Spanish classes (21 male, 92 female) participated in two treatment conditions (cultural instruction/no cultural instruction) over a 6-week period. Under the treatment condition the last 10 minutes of each 50 minute class were devoted to cultural instruction presented through discussions. To assess attitude changes the subjects completed the Revised Bogardus Social Distance Scale (RBSDS) and the How North Americans Perceive South Americans questionnaire (HNAPSA). An analysis of the results showed that the teaching of cultural information about South Americans through discussions significantly increased the students' acceptance of closer social ties with people from South America. Females were more willing to accept a closer social relationship to South Americans than were males. Subjects in the treatment condition also perceived more similarities between the cultures than those in the control group. Again, females were more affected by cultural information, with females in the treatment group perceiving more similarities than males. Females in the control group also perceived more differences between the cultures than control group males, which suggests that more research is needed on gender-related responses to cultural information. (BL)

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Teaching Culture: The Effects on Attitude Change
And Perceived Similarity*

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Abstract

A review of the literature concerning the relationship between exposing subjects to cultural information and effecting attitude change revealed two relevant factors: specificity of cultural information and mode of presentation. The purpose of this investigation was to test whether those factors could indeed influence subject's attitudes toward South Americans. Subjects in eight introductory Spanish classes were used in the experiment. A revision of Bogardus' Social Distance Scale and Nostrand's questionnaire "How North Americans Perceive South Americans" were administered to subjects. Analysis of variance revealed significant main effects for treatment and sex on the Social Distance Scale, and significant main effects for treatment on perceived similarity questions on Nostrand's questionnaire. A significant interaction was also found for sex and treatment on the Social Distance Scale.

The Effects of Teaching Culture on Attitude Change
and Perceived Similarity

Although there have been many attempts at teaching culture, with aims as varied as simply teaching information (Brown, 1977; Elton, 1979; Petronio, 1977), changing attitudes (Clark, 1980; Kilzer, 1978; Senke, 1980; Williamson, 1978), and trying to ease adjustment into a foreign culture (Brislin, 1979; Kraemer, 1973; Triandis, 1974), few have been empirically investigated to determine any significance. Much of this type of culture-teaching occurs in the language classroom, presented and planned by language teachers or management trainers for managers going abroad, neither of whom is usually trained in research methodology or statistical analysis.

Of those investigations involving empirical analysis, there has been mixed success, depending on the environment or situation in which the subjects experienced the exposure to the culture. For example, in artificial environments, such as the classroom, McFarlane (1945) studied the effects of a series of films portraying different African groups on attitudes and found no significant changes. McFarlane did find that those films showing daily African life were found to influence attitudes more than those of broader issues.

Similarly, in a Spanish language program, Cooke (1969) investigated the effects of general readings about South America on attitude change toward the South American people. No significant differences were found.

However, positive results have been found when the subjects have been exposed to cultural information as a result of living in the foreign country itself. Hoeh and Spuck (1975) evaluated the effects of a short-term study

abroad program on fifteen participants and did find a significant attitude improvement toward the foreign culture. Likewise, Pizzini (1979) investigated the impact of a study abroad program in Mexico and found a general positive attitude change toward the Mexican culture.

Although the paucity of empirical studies impedes sound generalizations about the effects of teaching culture on attitudes, it appears as though attempts to teach culture in an artificial environment should replicate as much as possible the realia of living in the foreign culture. Since it is not always possible to send students studying a foreign language or management personnel to the target country, finding ways to create a "natural" environment in the classroom or training location is very important.

From the research reviewed, it appears as though two potentially important factors to consider when exposing subjects to cultural information are a) communicating information about the daily life of individuals in the culture (McFarlane, 1945; Hoeh & Spuck, 1975; Pizzini, 1979) and b) presenting the information in a more interactive mode than the passive experience of watching films (McFarlane, 1945) or reading passages (Cooke, 1969). Certainly, in study abroad programs, there is much potential for interaction and discussion of ideas, habits, and customs.

Therefore, this experiment was undertaken to determine if attitudes toward the target culture could be improved by teaching culture-specific materials, emphasizing the teaching of daily habits and customs, and presenting the information in a more discussion-oriented way.

Method

Subjects

The subjects in this experiment were students in the introductory first and second semester Spanish language classes (Spanish 101 and 102) at a large, private religious university. One hundred and thirteen students participated in the experiment as follows: 60 subjects were in Spanish 101 and 53 were in Spanish 102; 21 were male and 92 were female subjects. Four Spanish 101 and four Spanish 102 classes participated.

Procedure

Two Spanish 101 and two 102 classes were randomly assigned to the treatment condition (cultural instruction) and two of each were assigned to control groups (no cultural instruction). Each class period lasted 50 minutes with the last 10 minutes being devoted exclusively to cultural instruction in the treatment condition. The instruction was given by the regular Spanish language instructor. Classes met four days a week and the experiment lasted for the first six weeks of the 13 week semester.

In the experimental condition, the cultural instruction was uniformly given in a required sequence to control for order effects. The content was also carefully controlled to avoid variation in information given. The instruments were administered after the six-week period of the experiment.

Instrumentation and Materials

The materials used in this treatment condition were Culture for Missionaries: South America. Hispanic (MTC, 1981) and Teaching About Cultural Awareness (Smith & Otero, 1977).

Specifically, examples of the topics covered in Culture for Missionaries: South America. Hispanic are "Living Conditions," "Stores and Markets,"

"Geography and Climate," "Living Conditions," "Transportation," "Media," "Etiquette," and "Money." In Teaching About Cultural Awareness the general topics of cultural awareness and perception were covered.

The instruments used to measure attitude change were the Revised Bogardus Social Distance Scale (See Table 1 for the RBSDS) and the questionnaire How North Americans Perceive South Americans (HNAPSA) (Nostrand, 1969). Although there were 21 countries included in the RBSDS, only the seven South American countries were included in the scoring to determine attitude change. Of the quantifiable items of HNAPSA, only those questions pertaining to the purpose of this study were analyzed: one, six to sixteen, and nineteen.

Insert Table 1 about here

Question one of HNAPSA asks for the amount of attitude improvement as a result of the culture teaching. Questions six through 16 ask for the subject's perception of the amount of similarity between the U.S. and South American culture with regard to things such as "diet," "etiquette," "family life," etc. Question 19 asks for the subject's attitude toward the favorability of the South American culture. Questions one and six through sixteen are Likert-type questions on a scale from one to five. Question nineteen asks for responses on a 20 bi-polarized adjective semantic differential.

Results

To determine main effects for treatment, class (Spanish 101 and 102) and sex on the RBSDS scale, a three-way analysis of variance was performed and revealed significant differences for treatment ($F=15.56$, $df=1/105$, $p<.001$) and sex ($F=7.73$, $df=1/105$, $p<.006$) with eta squareds of .34 and .24 for treatment and sex, respectively. The means for treatment were 210.51 and 166.98 for experimental and control groups, respectively; the means for sex were 195.69

for females and 156.57 for males. No significant interactions were found.

Testing for main effects for treatment, class and sex on question one of HNAPSA, a three-way analysis of variance indicated no significant differences. Question one elicits a response to the question "How much has the teaching of culture improved your attitude toward the South American culture?" Since this question only addresses itself to those subjects in the treatment condition, the results show that effects of the treatment were not significantly different among subjects in all treatment conditions. Hence, some confidence can be found to support the notion that the treatment had equal effects on subjects in all experimental classes.

A three-way analysis of variance for treatment, class and sex on the total score of items six through 16 on HNAPSA revealed a highly significant difference for treatment ($F=33.34$, $df=1/71$, $p<.001$) with means of 40.09 and 31.80 and an eta squared of .56 with a multiple r-squared of .32.

A near significant interaction was found between treatment and sex ($F=3.73$, $df=1/71$, $p<.058$) for the score on items six through sixteen with means of 41.1 and 37.7 for males and females in the treatment condition.

Analyzing question 19, a one-way analysis of variance revealed a significant difference between treatment and control groups ($F=9.77$, $df=1/71$, $p<.003$) with means of 49.97 and 42.55, respectively, and an eta squared of .35 and a multiple r-squared of .17.

Finally, a Pearson correlation was performed for subjects' scores on the RBSDS scale, the total score on items six through 16 (perceived similarities between U.S. and South American countries), and question 19 of HNAPSA. Such an analysis was performed to determine any possible relationships between social distance desirability, perceived similarity between cultures, and favorability

of attitude toward the South American cultures. A significant correlation ($p < .001$) of .45 ($r\text{-squared} = .25$) was found between perceived similarity and favorability of the South American cultures.

Discussion

It appears as though there is clear evidence that the teaching of cultural information about South America did significantly increase the students' acceptance of closer social ties with people from the South American countries listed on the RESDS. The significance for sex also indicates that females were more willing to accept a closer social relationship to South Americans than were the males.

A significant difference was also found between treatment and control groups on the questions asking for perceived similarities. Such a finding indicates those receiving cultural information perceived more similarities than those who received no supplemental information than that which they already had. Since neither the materials nor the instructors emphasized similarities or differences, it must be assumed that the students inferred such conclusions themselves.

An interaction between sex and treatment on perceived similarity between cultures also suggests that females are more affected by cultural information than are males. Those females in the control groups perceived more differences between the two cultures than did the control-group males; while in the experimental condition, the females perceived more similarities than did the males. It could be that generally males are more rigid about the information they have of other cultures so that any instruction about cultures affects their opinions less than it does the females' opinions. Such a suggestion needs to be investigated, however.

With significant differences between experimental and control groups on the social distance scale and on perceived similarity, such findings seem to point toward a possible relationship between perceived similarity and attraction. In this experiment, as subjects' perceptions of similarities increased, so did their perceptions of favorability toward the South Americans. It is reasonable to assume that the more favorable the attitude toward a people, the more one is attracted to the people. Certainly a clear relationship has been found to exist between perceived similarity and attraction (Arrowood & Short, 1973; Berscheid, 1966; Byrne, 1973; Newcomb, 1961).

That no differences were found for class (Spanish 101 and 102) suggests that exposure to a language, at least within the first year, may have little effect on attitudes. Perhaps prolonged exposure to a language without explicit cultural information being taught would still enhance attitude change. Cognitive dissonance would predict that an individual who studies a language for a long period of time would undoubtedly rationalize having a positive attitude toward the native people who speak the language he or she is learning.

In conclusion, it appears that presenting culture-specific materials and presenting them in a discussion-oriented mode can significantly improve attitudes toward another people. Further, it appears that culture-specific instruction can increase subjects' perception of similarities between one's own culture and the target culture, and that such perceived similarity may have an effect on intercultural attraction.

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Table 1

Revised Bogardus Social Distance Scale

We are interested in how you feel about the following statements.

Please put an X in the block after each statement with which you agree. Work quickly; it is your first impression which is most important. There are no right or wrong answers.

I would be willing to accept a person from the country listed below . . .	as a visitor to my country.	as a resident of my country.	as a citizen of my country.	as a member of my church.	as a classmate in my school.	as a roommate.	as a member of my "crowd."	into kinship by marriage.
Great Britain								
* Uruguay								
Pakistan								
Australia								
* Paraguay								
Israel								
* Colombia								
Sweden								
Formosa								
Saudi Arabia								
* Argentina								
France								
Russia								
* Bolivia								
South Africa								
Iran								
Germany								
* Chile								
United States								
India								
* Perú								

* Indicates those countries considered in the analysis for this study.

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